

Dear Diary...

Today is 15 June 1815 ,

Yesterday the head nurse announced that we will be having a general visit to our floor today, he'll be selecting two volunteer nurses to aid in the upcoming battle. It is to be fought in three days. He will arrive at noon, the entire hospital has been preparing for his arrival for the past two days. And apparently the head nurse (Mrs. Anna Clarke) who also happens to be my mentor (she insists I call her by her first and last name) has chosen two candidates she finds worthy for the battle. Although it is quite a job and many are frightful of the danger... I do hope to be chosen.

It will be my very first on sight medical experience . Since I am younger than many of the other nurses, I am always assigned to the same floor. Each day I come in I am told to go to floor #4.. Where the sick children and elderly are kept . I do love my patients but I dream of being more, I want to help and be part of something. But the only place I am allowed to even be remotely close to being a doctor is to be a nurse's aid for the sick. And that is a worthy profession but I've always dreamt of being a doctor and this job will give me the experience to be taken seriously among the men.

I've been told there will be a thorough evaluation tomorrow, I'm not sure what it entails but I'm sure I want to do well. Although an honorable task to be a military nurse, that is, many of the more "matured" women do not want to be chosen, all have their reasons but I can only assume the idea of being on an active battle field is not ideal to more family oriented women. That being

said, I do have some competition Elizabeth Cook, a younger nurse compared to the rest but still quite older compared to me. She is a dull woman, sensible and narrow almost..... She bore one child, a girl by the name of Grace. I hardly spoke to Elizabeth during my time volunteering at St Judith Hospital. I tried to befriend her seeing as she was the only woman somewhat close to my age, her being thirty-three and all. Within my first week volunteering, when I practically knew nothing about the unspoken rules of nursing at St. Judiths, I must have tried to speak to her five times. One for every day I worked that week, but despite my efforts she was surly and avoidant.

What I did not know at that time was that St. Judiths nurses and volunteers had an unspoken set of rules, and if broken, you might as well be in exile. As there is no official rulebook or list, distributed when starting at the hospital... this is what I've gathered thus far.... 1. One shall respect all nurses of a higher age ...2. One must always assume one is wrong if Mrs. Anna Clarke disagrees (this includes **any** decision made by oneself).....and 3. Addressing a vetted and experienced nurse or doctor without a formal introduction from one's supervisor is seen as quite disrespectful. I've practically had to make my own list of rules just to survive my first few months at St Judiths.

And although these past 6 months have allowed me to start living my dream of being a doctor, I do long to be more. My mentor Mrs. Anna Clarke has given me fair warning that Elizabeth is top choice and will be ready to take the position. I know that I do not hold as much experience as Elizabeth does, but I will not accept her besting me. There are two spots to be filled, all I have to do is acquire one and I can secure my future. An active battlefield may be a ghastly place but living my life without achieving my greatest ambition, that would be a dreadful reality.

Dear Diary....

Today is 16 June 1815,

It was tense, frigid even when I arrived at the hospital the morning of the general's visit. It was a cold morning, the air was dry and the skies were a deep gray, as the charcoal clouds crowded above. The entire 6th floor was almost empty. Most patients were moved to different floors so the general had a place to privately meet the candidates. When the general arrived on floor #6, the ladies and I all lined up facing each other in two rows, which Mrs. Anna Clarke insisted we practiced the day before. We've never had someone as powerful as a general visit our St. Judith Hospital.

It was 12:00 sharp. He had arrived. Mrs Anna Clakre rushed to greet him. He was a tall lanky man, rather surprising for someone in the troops. He wore a thick green felt coat and merit medals sewed across his uniform, his hair was a deep brown almost like espresso grinds. He had a long slicked mustache blanketing his lip to match. He walked in strides down the first line, examining each woman with a silent gaze. As he finished the first row of ladies... he walked down the second. One look and all my dreams could vanish. He trudged back to Mrs. Anna Clarke, she was beyond nervous, tapping her watch incessantly to mask it. Mrs. Anna Clarke then requested to discuss her two candidates with him in her office.

Fifteen Minutes later, the general emerged from the small closet sized office. As he marched down the rows, he cleared his throat and called the first chosen nurse, Mrs. Elizabeth Cook! As I heard her name, I felt a wave of panic flow over me. My concern began to grow. What if I am not chosen? Was I even considered? If not me, who?

One spot left.....just one. As he was about to announce the second nurse.. Mrs. Anna Clarke hastily walked over and whispered into his ear. The ladies and I, still stood in rows as if rooted in the floor. "Ms. _____Allen!"

Head facing the floor, I let out a light sigh, attempting to mask my sadness. I felt as though I was grieving the person I could have become. Until..... I glanced up, confused, I heard no response to the general's statement. As I lifted my head, attempting to refrain from letting the tears in my eyes flow down my face. Everyone was staring at me?.....Boggled, I looked at Mrs. Anna Clarke. " Is the girl well? " said the general. " I assure you, General Lance, she is quite fine, well girl what do you have to say?". " Ms. Allen... you do understand you have been selected,yes?".

I could feel my face go white, staggered, I could not believe it. The general has selected me to aid in the battle? I am entirely overjoyed! Something that I only dreamed of is happening! The rest of the ladies stepped outward, clapping their hands in congratulations to Mrs. Cook and I.

General Lance then announced his departure and need elsewhere. Mrs. Anna Clarke accompanied him to the door and thanked him for his time. As she walked back toward the center of the room, the ladies scurried to line up, backs straightened, a silence fell over floor #6.

Still absolutely gobsmacked, I start to realize what this means. I cannot lie, I am beyond scared to be on the battlefield although there will be soldiers guarding the Medical Tent for protection. It is absolutely mad that I will be just kilometers away from an active battlefield.

Dear Diary....

Today is 17 June 1815

A steady trotting passed my window this morning, waking me up from my second sleep. In order to be ready right on the dot, I set my clock for 3:00am and put on my uniform. The general was to arrive at 5 o'clock sharp. As I opened my eyes a clear thud hit my door. I rushed to grab my overnight bag, and head downstairs to the parlor. General Lance knocked at the door again, I swung the door open to see him waiting on the stoop. A tall black carriage with red rimmed wooden wheels stood parked behind him, a rangy horse placed in front.

When I stepped up into the carriage, it all began to feel real. I really was going to battle. I didn't know what the future nights held, or how long it would last. I had begun to grow numb to blood and wounds whilst volunteering at the hospital, although I mainly cared for the ill, I had worked on open wounds before, but that was with the help of my mentor and doctors. I would only be chosen when the hospital was most lively. Now I am first care for injuries on the battlefield. Responsible for keeping soldiers alive until they can be sent to the nearest hospital.

Mrs. Cook, seated across from me, had been silent the entire ride, she seemed nervous. I'm still confused that she was so quick to accept the offer. She does have a husband and child to look after. She doesn't speak much of them at the hospital, I mean it really is no place for conversing about one's personal stories and details, but the other ladies don't mind that. Always going on and on about children's schooling and home making. The coachman announced that we were close to arrival. Ten Minutes!

I'm not sure how much time had passed before the announcement but it had been such a smooth ride, I didn't mind. I have never left my home city (Braine l'alleud) , it isn't common for girls to leave their childhood cities before marriage, unless they are to attend schooling or to be finished. My mother never found finishing school fit for me. She assumed I would not succeed because of my many "strange" ambitions. Nevertheless I am beyond relieved I was not forced to attend like my sisters, as much as I disagree with my mothers ways, she was right I wouldn't have "fit" there.

The carriage came to a halt. Forcing me to slide into one of the lieutenant's shoulders. There were exactly 3 in the carriage with us, and of course General Lance accompanied.

When we arrived the lieutenants exited first and walked to the entrance of a tall white cotton tent a couple feet away. Next to it stood one almost exactly the same, except..... There was something different about it. General Lance explained that the first tent is Mrs. Cook and I's sleeping quarters, and that the one closest is the medical aid tent.

My fear began to grow, during the carriage ride to the site, I had time to push it away, try and focus on something else. But now... the realization that a battle will be happening just kilometers away hit me harder than ever before. I had to focus, all my attention should be on patients, I calmed myself down and began to unpack my bag onto my cot. As I looked up I realized that Mrs. Cook was still. Sitting on the edge of her cot, she appeared dozed off. Just as I was about to say something, a blaring honk interrupted. It was General Lance's blow horn, ordering us to leave our tent.

Another lieutenant had come to escort us to the medical tent so we could get familiar with the tools, he walked us both over, Mrs. Cook, still silent, went up to the first operating table. There were four, long and steel. The entire site was stiff and frigid. Barely anybody spoke. Just a silent,

gloomy field covered in white tents. Just then... a group of soldiers came marching through camp, passing the medical tent. A general leading them to the other side of camp to do drills.

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Dear Diary

Today is 18 June 1815

Today the battle began, it was early morning when word came into the camp that the French were coming. Suddenly that quiet, still, field that it was the evening before was gone. The camp was filled with lieutenants, generals, soldiers all bustling around preparing for the battle.

Soldiers hopping in armored cars and trucks. The same soldiers from yesterday came passing by my tent again, this time was different. They were dressed in knee length navy blue coats, tan and red belts and fabric buttons binding both sides of the coat together. A long gleaming black rifle in hand.

Absolute fear in their eyes... It was a frightful sight. Suddenly the people that were chosen and trained to protect, deemed heroes, seemed so meek. All staring, observing the generals every move, except one. He seemed as though he knew something the others did not. Instead of fright or worry he seemed unchanged from yesterday. He seemed familiar almost, as though I'd known someone or know someone like him. In his eyes I did not see the same look of fear, they were almost.. vacant. I could only hope they would make it out safely.

Two horns blew. It was time.

The camp was bare, all that were left were the guardian lieutenants, and Mrs. Cook and I. It'd hadn't been long since they left but it felt as so. The same fear of worry washed over my body again. I couldn't shake it this time. Instead of a sadness for myself it was a sadness for those boys and men. Strangers still but their lives will be in my hands as time swiftly passes.

An hour had passed no word from the troops. Then suddenly, injured soldiers started flooding in on gurneys. The men were called first to the medical tent, but as more and more arrived, Mrs. Cook and I were called in.

Two guards rushed into the medical tent, carrying a wounded soldier by his shoulders and legs. It was the same soldier from earlier that day. This time he looked scared. I advised him to not look at his wound as it would only worry him more. I had to extract the bullet from his neck, it was making it quite difficult for him to breathe steadily. But while operating on him, I noticed his tags, Philip G. Lance. He was the general's son. It took time but after removal, he was rushed to the nearest hospital. At the time I could only hope he would make it.

Dear Diary,

Today is 19 June 1815

The battle has ended. Napoleon's forces were defeated. The Duke of Wellington returned back to camp early this morning declaring victory. Napoleon's rain of domination has come to an end.

General Lance has left camp to see his son. He underwent surgery last night, but we have not received word of his condition. A carriage has been sent for Mrs. Cook and I, and the two guards will accompany us back home.

We arrived at Mrs. Cook's home, and as the coachman turned out of the neighborhood, I asked if we could make one stop. We pulled into St. Judith's entrance, and as I walked in, I saw Mrs. Anna Clarke. She seemed relieved, even almost let out a grin. I immediately asked what floor Mr. Philip Lance was on. When I got to the room, General Lance was waiting in the hallway outside the door. We gave each other a confused stare, then I greeted him as an officer. I asked why he was outside the room, he said he could not bare to go in. The doctors disclosed that Mr. Philip was sleeping last they checked. General Lance waited all night at the hospital. Checking on his soldiers but couldn't bring himself to see Philip. I asked if I could go and see him, and if he would want to accompany me. We walked in and Philip was sitting upright in the bed. I wondered if he'd even recognize me.

He instantly looked so relieved to see his father, and then he looked over to me. "'Doctor!" he exclaimed. I lightly laughed, and assured him I am not yet a doctor. He claimed I saved his life and his father was incredibly grateful.